

Appendix 3

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF REVISED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Ipswich Equality Impact Assessment

What is the report trying to achieve?

Ipswich's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council will involve the local community and other key organisations and stakeholders when we prepare our planning policies and consider planning applications. All local planning authorities are required under section 18 (1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to prepare and maintain a SCI.

The report is seeking to update the SCI in light of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amended) Regulations 2020.

Under this amendment the Council is not required to make documents available at its "principal office and at such other places within their area as the local planning authority consider appropriate" (Regulation 35). In addition, the Council is not required to provide a copy of the documents to a person who requests it (Regulation 36). These amendments have been put in place to protect the public and council officers from the spread of Covid-19 and will only be in place for a temporary period ending on the 31st December 2020.

The SCI has the potential to impact upon equality as its implementation will affect the means the Council uses to engage the community in the plan making process, all be it for a temporary period.

If 'No Impact' explain why:

Implementing the revised SCI is not expected to create any barriers to participation for people with the following protected characteristics: race; sex; sexual orientation; pregnancy or maternity; marriage and civil partnership; and gender reassignment.

If you have identified any negative impacts (above) how can they be minimised or removed?

The revised SCI could act as a barrier to participation for people with the following protected characteristics age.

Under the revised SCI, the only means of inspecting planning policy documents will via the Council's website. Paper copies of documents will no longer be available within the at the Council's Offices, the Town Hall or the County Library. Based on digital capabilities the age group in which a higher percentage of people do not have basic digital skills is the 65 plus age group. In Ipswich, this age group accounts for 16.5% of the population. This group is likely to be adversely affected by the changes proposed to the SCI.

For those who are not digitally enabled, the Council will continue to use other reasonable means to promote effective community engagement such as advertising consultations in the local press and continuing to contact people of the local plan database via letter.

The change in the regulations will only be in place for a temporary period ending on the 31st December 2020 (unless extended by national government). The purpose of the change is to protect the public and staff from Covid-19 and ensure the Council is compliant with the current government guidance on staying at home and staying away from others. Covid-19 has created an unprecedented situation and the Council must put the safety of residents above the requirement to place physical copies of planning documents in venues across the Town. The Council is aware that older residents are most likely to require paper copies of the documents, but equally this group is also most vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19.

Does the report meet Ipswich Borough Council's equality objectives?

The report helps us to 'eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment & victimisation' in the following way(s):

The SCI helps to eliminate unlawful discrimination by continuing to promote effective community engagement through the following mechanisms:

- E-mailing and writing to interested parties on the Council's local plan consultation database;
- Providing document for inspection on the Council's website;
- Advertising consultations through public notices, the Council's website, social media and Council publications as appropriate;
- Posting notices in prominent locations where a development plan document identifies development proposals relating to a specific area of land.

Through the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Paper, we are aware of areas of deprivation and poverty within Ipswich and understand that these groups are less likely to have the technology available at home to enable them to access the internet. However, the majority of people now have access to at least one household smart phone and therefore we will ensure that the planning policy webpages are accessible via phone. To address any potential impacts on the disadvantaged groups the Council has reviewed the planning policy webpages to ensure they are more user friendly. In addition will be arranging special notifications for specialist groups in consultation with the Community Engagement Officer. We will also be preparing presentations which will be delivered remotely at specialist group meetings.

The report helps us to 'advance equality of opportunity...' in the following way(s):

There are many benefits to using technology to engage disadvantaged groups. For example, font size can be increased for those who have visual impairment, similarly a hearing version of documents can assist those with limited sight. Online documents can be translated into different languages, enabling all sections of the community access to information regardless of their first language.

The revised SCI continues to promote effective community engagement by other practical means such as providing documents for inspection on a public website and social media. Research suggests that young adults are reluctant to engage in the planning process. Social media is a popular means of interaction for younger adults and the Council is committed to the use of online platforms to engage younger people on planning matters, as a means of enhancing equality of opportunity.

The policy helps us to 'foster good relations...' in the following way(s):

The SCI update helps to foster good relations by helping to publicising this temporary change in regulatory requirements. In accordance with the Planning Practice Guidance on Plan Making the Council has made clear that the change in temporary whilst restrictions relating to COVID-19 are in place. The Council will look to revert to its usual practice of making hard copies of planning policy documents available at accessible venues across Ipswich as soon as it is safe to do so. The policy continues to promote effective community engagement via other means which are reasonably practical.